

You have nothing to do today. You have decided to give yourself the day off because you don't have any editing jobs to do. No problem, you can decide to give yourself the day off whenever. No problem.

You walk from one side of the apartment you live in to the other, not realizing that you are doing this, as you engage in tasks at one side of the apartment and then the other. There are a lot of things you don't realize about yourself, like that secretly you just want to walk from one side of the apartment to the other, that secretly the things you think you're engaging with are not what you're really into, that you're really a person who deep down likes to walk from one end to the other of your apartment.

And you realize that you are going back and forth, and you realize that that means that you are secretly a defective person who should not love her life, who should contemplate a major change: a new job, new friends, new city, suicide. It's all part of the same thing. Why be satisfied with your life? Life satisfaction is a lie, when there's a better life for you somewhere else.

You normally love life, even when it's hard, even when it's meaningless. But now you find yourself in a quandary. There is certainly a better life for you somewhere. Surely if all of your friends approved of your life, you could allow yourself to approve of your own life. But

if they don't understand, then you need to consider a major change: a new job, new friends, new city, suicide. Your friends want the best for you, a major change: a new job, new friends, new city, suicide.

You are normally okay with being unhappy, sometimes. But couldn't there be a better life out there?

You decide to write down what you've been thinking about, thinking that it might make for a good story. But you know that you're just avoiding the thing you really need to do, which is to make a major change. Change is hard. But if you're brave, you can do it. If you suffer, then you should be unhappy and if you're unhappy, you should contemplate a major change. Change is scary. But if you're brave, you can do what's in your best interests.

Why are you thinking these thoughts? you wonder. Is this healthy? Your editing business works for you pretty well. You know that if you talked to your friends, they would never say to your face that if you suffered you ought to be unhappy, and that if you are unhappy you need to make a major change. In fact, people like Brian and Julia are the last people to mean that even behind your back. You have some other friends, some of them ex-friends, who live in your head, though. If you could just get rid of them, you could have a perfect (that is, adequate) 10 out of 10 life satisfaction score. In

other words, you could be content with your suffering and unhappiness, and that contentment would allow you to be happier and to suffer less. And you would be a braver person.

Thinking this helps to give you strength, but you have those nagging doubts, from people you rarely see anymore, or hopefully will never see again. Doubts from people who thought they were your friends, at the time.

You know thought traps like these. You know how seeking the truth doesn't work when you get into one of them. You know how you get trolled by the desire to do the right thing, think the right thing, consider all the points of view. You know all this.

These thought traps are so seductive. You start to have to think in terms of what's good for you in your lived life, rather than thinking in terms of objective truth. You'll get trolled by this thought trap if you let yourself flow into it. You don't know the truth. All you know is your apartment, and your feelings. There's no room in the world for there to be God, or even no God, or even a lack of knowledge of whether God exists or not. There is room for suffering, unhappiness, and lack of life satisfaction.

You decide to change your clothes and go to Mitzi's Cafe. And while you walk to Mitzi's, with a burning feeling you know that there has to be something more than

this, and for a moment, you know that there is.

WAITING FOR MARGOT  
episode 11 "Chutes and Ladders"

You enter Mitzi's Cafe and order some green tea. You know that caffeine will do nothing for you, nor the flavor of the tea. And you know that there has to be more than this.

You see Julia with a man -- probably a date. And Brian by himself at another table. You sit down next to Brian.

YOU: Brian, do you think that I should make a major change?

BRIAN: What did you have in mind?

YOU: New job, new city, new friends.

BRIAN: Are you unhappy?

YOU: Yes.

BRIAN: Why is that?

YOU: Because I suffer.

BRIAN: Is that a good reason to be unhappy?

YOU: Maybe.

BRIAN: So you're in doubt about that... now, doubt... that's a reason to be unhappy...

YOU: Yeah, I guess that makes sense.

BRIAN: Well, this is odd. You're not usually like this. Did something happen?

YOU: I took the day off work today.

BRIAN: Okay, maybe that's it.

YOU: But this doesn't happen every day I take off work.

BRIAN: Like this is something new?

YOU: Yeah.

BRIAN: Okay, so it's how you're feeling today. You might feel differently tomorrow.

YOU: Yeah. That's true.

BRIAN: Hey, you're middle-aged, so you should know this stuff by now. Maybe there's something to what you're saying.

YOU: Maybe.

BRIAN: Maybe this, maybe that.

YOU: I had the feeling, while I was coming here, that there had to be more than this. I don't know exactly what "this" is, but there has to be more than it.

BRIAN: Yeah. There does have to be.

YOU: And for a moment I thought that there was something.

BRIAN: Yeah. I think there is something.

YOU: But you don't know.

BRIAN: When I'm not talking out loud, I know.

YOU: So you don't know.

BRIAN: Well, because I'm talking to you, I'll say, yeah, I don't know.

YOU: But you don't believe it.

BRIAN: Absolutely not. I firmly believe that there's more than this. God speaks meaning to all of us, all the time.

YOU: But you can't prove God's existence.

BRIAN: No, but God speaks to you even through your belief that he doesn't exist.

YOU: But maybe it's not God.

BRIAN: It's God.

YOU: You don't know that.

BRIAN: You're right, I don't know that. And it is God. I don't know that God exists. But God exists.

YOU: As though your beliefs don't have anything to do with whether or not he does...

BRIAN: Exactly. God exists, or he doesn't exist, regardless of what I believe.

YOU: So you're an agnostic?

BRIAN: No, that would be dishonest. I believe that God exists.

YOU: But you don't know that God exists.

BRIAN: No.

YOU: So you're half-agnostic.

BRIAN: I guess so.

YOU: Sorry I'm pushing so hard... I've got a weird energy in me.

BRIAN: Have you been getting into any thought traps recently?

YOU: Yeah.

BRIAN: Okay, we should play a game, then. Take our minds out of this.

He gets up and brings back Chutes and Ladders.

BRIAN: You want to play Chutes and Ladders?

YOU: Okay.

You and Brian set up the board and choose your pieces. The game came with a spinner, but it's broken, so you go and get a die from the Monopoly board to take its place.

BRIAN: Maybe someone will interrupt us, like last time.

YOU: Maybe.

You play some more, only speaking as much as is necessary to keep the game

going.

BRIAN: Chutes and Ladders might have been the wrong choice.

YOU: Yeah, this game is really existential.

BRIAN: You don't have any real choice.

YOU: But you go through the game getting involved in it, even if there's no choice.

BRIAN: At least everyone wins at the end.

YOU: Yeah, the board is set up for that. But is it really winning? From a player's point of view, isn't the game all about choices made? The winning tile, what does it even mean? What are these kids getting out of life?

BRIAN: Maybe they died and went to heaven.

YOU: Maybe they're in middle school, or high school.

BRIAN: Are you enjoying this game?

YOU: Yeah, it's okay.

BRIAN: And you don't have any choice.

YOU: No, it's all chance and necessity.

BRIAN: But you're participating in it.

YOU: Yeah.

BRIAN: You can choose to participate or not, you can choose to trust or not.



YOU: And that's my choice.

BRIAN: Are you satisfied with this game?

YOU: Yeah, I'm pretty happy with this game.

Up the ladders, down the chutes, around and around, no game, all game. You and Brian were made for gentle games like Chutes and Ladders, not for wargames or mindgames or lovegames. You two will be wiped out some day by the kind of people who are at a 7 out of 10 on life satisfaction and a 9 out of 10 in happiness.

YOU: Brian, since I'm being weird today, I'm going to tell you something.

BRIAN: Okay.

YOU: You're a real friend.

BRIAN: You're a real friend, too, Beth.

YOU: We're playing Chutes and Ladders.

BRIAN: Yes. Here we are in life.

YOU: Next time I feel weird, I'm going to remember to trust.

You and Brian finish the game.

Julia and her associate get up from their table and approach.

MAN: Hey, I see you guys were playing Chutes and Ladders.

YOU: Yes, we were.

MAN: That used to be my least-favorite game growing up. I thought it was so stupid.

JULIA: This is Eric, by the way.

YOU: Hi Eric.

ERIC: Hi.

YOU: I'm Beth.

ERIC: Hi, Beth.

BRIAN: I'm Brian.

ERIC: Hi, Brian.

YOU: You two are on a date?

ERIC: Yes. It's been going pretty well.

YOU: And now you're over here.

ERIC: Yes.

YOU: What were you saying about hating Chutes and Ladders as a kid?

ERIC: Yes, well, I hated it because there was no point to it. No way to game it.

YOU: Yeah, we were just realizing that all of life is like that. There's no way to game life, all you can do is either trust it, or not.

ERIC: That sounds like a religious thing to think. Are you religious?

YOU: No. Well, maybe I'm part of the religion of life.

ERIC: The religion of midlife, perhaps?

Eric does look old enough to know what that is.

YOU: Yes, the way no one has any answers.

ERIC: And none of us know any better than anyone else.

YOU: Right.

ERIC: That's a religion?

YOU: Yes, I think so.

ERIC: What's the god of that religion? Every religion has a god.

YOU: Brokenness?

ERIC: Maybe. Maybe limitation.

YOU: Or maybe just existence?

ERIC: Maybe there is no god, after all. Which makes it the true atheism.

JULIA: What about caring about people? Couldn't that be a god?

BRIAN: Yeah, that can be a god.

YOU: But there's something more than this. There's something more than people. There's something more than humility.

ERIC: What would that be?

YOU: I don't know, but when I need it, I'm alive. And when I let myself sink into the religion of midlife, I become sad. I don't feel sad, but I am sad.

ERIC: And that's the best there is, and you have to accept it.

JULIA: No! Why should we have to accept that?

ERIC: Because over time, we come to realize that.

JULIA: "Over time, we come to"... Oh... I see what's going on. Our god is maturity.

ERIC: No, it's not. It's reality. We are coming to understand reality, over time.

JULIA: And you know reality better as you get older?

BRIAN: Isn't it possible to get less in touch with the truth as you get older?

ERIC: But over time, we move beyond the truth, if we really did know the truth as younger people. We don't presume to know the truth.

JULIA: It still sounds to me like your god is maturity.

ERIC: Julia, I really appreciate you. And maybe you're right. When you're my age, you'll know for sure.

Julia is angry but doesn't say anything.

BRIAN: Eric, I don't know if you know this, but Julia has been older than you are.

ERIC: Really? I don't understand.

JULIA: Brian is just saying that I've thought about this stuff a lot.

Brian looks confused, then seemingly understands. You seemingly understand that Julia doesn't like talking about her curse with her dates.

ERIC: I hope I haven't come off as smug or all-knowing.

YOU: No, not at all.

ERIC: Great, I wouldn't want to offend anyone.

YOU: No, you haven't offended any of us.

You are sincere in saying this. It's beautiful how much he cares about the feelings of people who are connected to his date.

ERIC: I know there are a lot of problems in the world, but it's so hard to do anything about them.

YOU: I know. You just have to do what you can.

ERIC: Well, it's getting kind of late. It was great to meet you all!

He walks out of the cafe.

JULIA: I got him to leave early.

YOU: You did?

JULIA: Sometimes, when I want something, I get it.

YOU: How did you know it was you?

JULIA: I know.

YOU: Is this a consistent thing?

JULIA: No, it's only when I really want it.

BRIAN: It seemed like you didn't want him to know that you are sometimes older than your age.

JULIA: Yeah, it's better that way.

BRIAN: Why is that?

JULIA: You know why.

BRIAN: Okay, yeah, I know why.

YOU: Do you think you'll ever see him again?

JULIA: No, but I will. He'll come back under a different name.

You three sit silently for half a minute.

BRIAN: How's the dating coming along?

JULIA: Some dates go better than others. I still don't really know what form my man is going to take.

BRIAN: But at least you're still going through different ones.

JULIA: But I get tired of it. Brian, you believe in God. Cry out to him for me to be done with all this. I cry out, but I know it doesn't reach him, because I don't believe.

BRIAN: Keep moving me.

JULIA: What do you mean?

BRIAN: Horrify me. Then I can cry out.

JULIA: Okay. I get tired. I get real tired of all this. It makes me want to scream sometimes. But there's nowhere to scream in this city. I've looked everywhere for a screaming place. Is this a screaming place? Nope. In Mitzi's Cafe, people live forever. They don't scream.

BRIAN: I wish I could be horrified, but I'm not.

JULIA: Brian, you believe in God, but do you understand what it's like to live in the moment?

BRIAN: I've heard that it's a really good thing.

JULIA: No, Brian, to live in the moment is a really bad thing. Living in the moment when the moment is empty is to have no past or future to escape to. When the moment is frustration, it's hell and you wish there was some way out of the moment. As the same thing happens over and over, time stops continuing forward in a line and starts looping on itself, and it's the same thing. Each date is unique and different and everything becomes the same. There's a level on which everything is the same.

BRIAN: The term for time continuing on in a line is "chronos", and the term for time looping on itself is "gathered time" or "kairos".

JULIA: Okay, yeah. Chronos is good. Kairos is bad. My life is a moment carried forward in time, with lots of novelty and variety and everything is the same.

YOU: Do you ever feel like there has to be something more than all of this?

JULIA: Yes. That's the only thing that keeps me alive. Not that I hope that there really is something, but that the ache of the desire gives me life.

YOU: Yes.

BRIAN: And is this ache the same as not having life satisfaction, Beth?

YOU: Hm... no...

JULIA: Life satisfaction?

BRIAN: People can suffer a lot, and even be unhappy, and still be satisfied with their lives. But people can not suffer, feel pleasure, even be happy, and not be satisfied with their lives.

JULIA: Okay. Yeah, this ache is different. Completely different.

BRIAN: How so?

JULIA: This ache is alive.

YOU: It's definite, and there's courage to it.

JULIA: But the other ache is dead. It's not even really an ache, but more of a gnawing.



YOU: There's no courage to it, no confrontation. It's something you do with a stunned mind.

BRIAN: So it's like by maintaining that there ought to be something truly good, you stay alive.

YOU: Yeah. Even if that thing doesn't exist.

BRIAN: There's a certain kind of person who tries to suppress that ache.

YOU: Yeah. Why would they do that?

BRIAN: I don't know, but it's interesting that they seem so eager to do that.

YOU: Maybe they used to feel it, but it was inconvenient, so they changed their values so that they wouldn't feel it anymore, and now it seems bad to them.

BRIAN: Maybe they just had to go to work.

JULIA: You can definitely feel like there should be something more out of life when you're at work.

YOU: But if you do the same thing, day after day, there's a deadening impulse.

BRIAN: Maybe things will get better when nobody has to work because robots will be doing work for us.

YOU: Brian, my life is unstructured enough as it is. Neither work nor lack of work would help me on days like today.

BRIAN: Yeah. When you have defeated all your enemies, the last, which you can never defeat, is

Time.

YOU: That sounds like a line from a book.

BRIAN: It should be. Maybe I should put it in a book.

YOU: Do you write books?

BRIAN: I'm working on one right now.

YOU: What's it about?

BRIAN: The usual things I'm into. I don't want to talk about it any more than that for now.

YOU: Okay. Well, I'd be interested in reading it when it's done.

BRIAN: Okay. Remind me if I forget.

YOU: If you can't defeat Time, maybe it would be good to dream your life away. Like in *Brave New World*.

BRIAN: No, because while you can never defeat Time, you can always confront it, if you have courage. If you can trust well, you can fight Time, or... maybe... get it to respect you... no need to fight, just to be full of the spirit....

YOU: But how can we have courage if we know better than to have courage? If we know better than to ignore the limitations of the world and listen to our hearts?

BRIAN: That's a good question.

YOU: But if we could do that, it would be

worthwhile to live a life like mine or yours, every day the same, no dreams or anesthesia.

BRIAN: Yes.

JULIA: So what are we going to do?

BRIAN: What do you mean?

JULIA: People are just going to turn us off. Pinch us like a candle.

YOU: We're going to quench each other.

BRIAN: Then we have to use our discipline to try again, to awaken again.

YOU: You want to start a religion?

BRIAN: Our god would be God.

YOU: In the way that the midlife religion has no god?

BRIAN: Yes.

YOU: I believe in that kind of God.

BRIAN: You do?

YOU: I do but I want to really believe.

BRIAN: In the Bible, someone says to Jesus "I believe, help my unbelief".

YOU: Cry out to your God for me, Brian, to help my unbelief in the God we already share.

BRIAN: Can you horrify me?

YOU: No. But maybe your God will move in you to cry out for me.

BRIAN: We'll see.

JULIA: Brian. Don't quench her.

BRIAN: I live on discipline and don't know how to be otherwise. But God's behavior ultimately doesn't depend on me.

JULIA: So we have to wait.

BRIAN: There's a Simone Weil book called *Waiting for God*.

JULIA: So we're waiting for God.

There's not too much to say to each other after that for a while, and you put the game away, and leave the cafe separately.

You go for a walk outside and try praying to Brian's God, or to whatever God there is behind whatever Brian believes. You suppose that Brian would say that behind whatever belief there is itself, there must be a personal being of ultimate meaning-conveying ability. So Brian's God has to be the real God, by definition, although at the same time Brian might misunderstand him. It doesn't make sense, but now is not a time for making sense of things. Courage is not about making sense of things.

You pray as sincerely as you can, but you don't feel anything.

You come back to your apartment,  
feeling tired, and agitated, and content.

[closing theme]

WAITING FOR MARGOT  
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## COMMENTS

(no comments)

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